

Linear vs. Circular Movements

Of the many martial arts styles being taught there have been claims that some ways of movement or delivery of techniques are inferior. Some styles and instructors have claimed that linear movement is far superior. Other styles and instructors have claimed that circular movements are the superior of the two. Although each one is definitely a different type of movement their goals are the same. Each movement is designed to deliver a technique with the greatest speed. Each movement should be examined for its strengths and its weaknesses and used appropriately.

To begin with, linear techniques are considered to be a more direct. If we wanted to move from point A to point B we would move in a straight line. This would be the quickest way from point to point. This type of movement is actually considered to be finite, limited to the length of the extremity. The power, speed, target and focus of a fist, for example all have to be done within the reach of the extremity. Circular movements on the other hand reach maximum speed at approximately half circle, with no loss of velocity thereafter. Circular has the capability to be infinite during their use. These movements have the ability to blend into each other allowing them to become endless.

Secondly, during linear movement maximum velocity is reached just prior to the end of the movement. So to get maximum impact from a linear movement it needs to be focused. For it to be able to transfer the maximum impact of energy it needs as much speed as possible and focused on a specific target. Since a circular movement has gained maximum velocity at half circle and no loss thereafter the focus needed in a linear movement becomes unnecessary for circular. The maximum effect of circular movements can be at half circle and done with striking through the target. Circular movements allow for a natural flow of continuation of techniques unlike linear which one technique must be completed to begin the second one.

In another aspect, most attack movements travel along a relative horizontal plane. So for a block to be effective it must move on the opposite plane as the strike. This means in order to gain the greatest surface area against the attacking extremity, we would want the block to be at a perpendicular position to the strike. If both the attack and the block traveled the same horizontal plane then the block would have a greater chance of missing and being ineffective. The quickest way to engage the attack with a block is to use a circular movement. With this movement blocking and attacking can be continuous. This is where circular movements allow for a quick response. In contrast, a linear movement blocking response would require a change in direction. The blocking arm would have to be reset; this takes time. Thus not allowing for maximum speed in-between techniques.

Each one of these movements has a superior side and an inferior side. The movement needs to be looked at for what the performer is trying to accomplish. Each one has a quality that the other cannot match. Thus linear movements have greater reach and circular movements have greater continuity. By using movements to their greatest strengths, we can have a more complete arsenal. Neither movement is superior to the other. Each has its own function. Knowing that function and using it at the proper times enhances the movement of the others. A wise martial artist will learn from each and apply them accordingly.

Sensei Thomas Harty
www.shuridragon.com
shuridragon@aol.com

Works Cited

Otake, Ben. "Linear vs. Circular." American Samurai
Feb. 2000 : p-30